



## **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

1400 South 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718

June 26, 2012

To: Governor's Office, Mike Volesky, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801  
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704  
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901  
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office	Parks Division	Lands Section	FWP Commissioners
Fisheries Division	Legal Unit	Wildlife Division	Design &
Construction			

MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103  
MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620  
James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624  
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624  
George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624  
Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771  
Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624  
Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923  
Jack Jones, 3014 Irene St., Butte, MT 59701  
Jack Atcheson, 2309 Hancock Avenue, Butte MT 59701  
Beaverhead Conservation District, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725  
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725  
Big Hole Watershed Committee, P.O. Box 931, Butte, MT 59703  
Montana Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 7186, Missoula, MT 59807  
Dan Vermillion, FWP Commissioner, Livingston MT  
Earnest and Colleen Bacon, 2215 Fishtrap Creek Road, Wisdom, MT 59761  
Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, 730 N. Montana Street, Dillon, MT 59725-9424  
George Grant Chapter of Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 563, Butte, MT 59703  
Skyline Sportsmen, P.O. Box 173, Butte, MT 59703  
Anaconda Sportsmen, 2 Cherry, Anaconda, MT 59711

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The enclosed decision notice has been prepared for the proposed Reintroduction of Native Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Ruby Creek by Removal of Nonnative Rainbow Trout with Electrofishing and Rotenone. FWP is proposing to reintroduce genetically pure native Madison Drainage westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) into Ruby Creek, south of Ennis, after capturing and transferring existing Ruby Creek rainbow trout to the Madison River. Rotenone will be used to remove any rainbow trout not captured by electrofishing and transferred. A second rotenone treatment may be necessary in 2013.

Comments to the Draft Environmental Assessment were received from six parties during the 30-day public comment period. All comments favored the proposal or thought it to be a workable project.

It is my decision to proceed with the proposed project with no changes to the Draft Environmental Assessment.

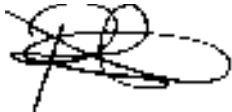
Questions regarding this Decision Notice should be directed to:

Pat Clancey  
Fisheries Biologist  
Box 1336  
Ennis, MT 59729

Or emailed to: [pclancey@mt.gov](mailto:pclancey@mt.gov)

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "PJF", with a large loop and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Patrick J. Flowers  
Region Three Supervisor

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE

### REINTRODUCTION OF NATIVE WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT IN RUBY CREEK BY REMOVAL OF NONNATIVE RAINBOW TROUT WITH ELECTROFISHING AND ROTENONE

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Region Three, Bozeman  
June 26, 2012

#### **Proposed Actions**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has proposed a project that facilitates conservation of native westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) in Southwest Montana. Genetically “pure” WCT are estimated to persist in only 4 - 5% of their historic range in the upper Missouri River drainage and most remaining populations are considered “*at-risk*”. The proposed project, located in Ruby Creek, south of Ennis, includes the use of electrofishing and a piscicide (rotenone) to remove nonnative rainbow trout and transfer of WCT into stream reaches where nonnative trout have been removed. The project is designed to reduce threats to WCT populations considered *at-risk*, to increase the overall distribution of WCT, and to conserve the genetic legacy of existing WCT populations.

#### **Montana Environmental Policy Act**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared by FWP for the proposed project and released on May 17, 2012 for a 30 day public comment period. The draft EA was titled: *Reintroduction of Native Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Ruby Creek by removal of Nonnative Rainbow Trout with Electrofishing and Rotenone*.

The draft EA was circulated to a standard FWP R-3 contact list and to local landowners, sporting groups, governments, and federal agencies. The EA was also posted and remains available for viewing on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices>. A legal notice indicating release of the EA was sent to the *Madisonian* (Ennis) and the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* (Bozeman).

#### **Summary of Public Comment and FWP Response**

Written comments (email and letter) were received from five parties and verbal comment from one party during the 30 day EA review period that ended June 16, 2012. All commenting parties supported the proposed project or felt it to be a workable project as proposed. Letters were received from the Madison River Foundation and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, emails were received from three individuals and verbal comment from the adjacent landowner. Both organizations offered volunteer help for the pre-treatment fish salvage and stream monitoring during the rotenone treatment.

Issues and concerns identified in the comments were:

- the perilous situation WCT face within the Missouri River Drainage and the Madison sub-basin
- the need to increase the distribution of secure WCT populations
- securing high quality habitat for WCT
- restricting angling access on WCT populations
- the proposed project will help meet the objectives of the *Memorandum of Understanding and Conservation Agreement for Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in Montana*
- the eventual impacts of climate change on cold water fish populations
- adjacent landowners stated they felt the commitment to capture the existing rainbow trout by electrofishing and transfer them to the Madison River makes the project workable from their perspective
- that FWP should implement all necessary cautions to minimize rotenone risk to non-target aquatic and terrestrial organisms
- FWP should be mindful of impacts to grizzly bears during project implementation and properly store and manage all attractants and train project personnel to be bear aware and carry bear spray while in the field.

FWP recognizes the concerns raised and is implementing programs, projects, and policies to address such concerns. Implementation of the FWP Piscicide Policy as described on page 12 of the Ruby Creek EA and the Ruby Creek project itself are examples of these actions.

Regarding grizzly bear concerns, FWP equips project personnel that will be in remote locations with bear spray and coaches them in its proper use. Additionally, FWP will work with the federal agencies to provide hand-held radios to project personnel to facilitate not only efficient project implementation and coordination, but also for emergency communications and to alert the entire crew to bear sightings.

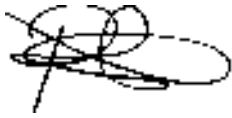
Final Environmental Assessment for the EA titled: Reintroduction of Native Westslope Cutthroat Trout in Ruby Creek by Removal of Nonnative Rainbow Trout with Electrofishing and Rotenone.

There are no modifications necessary to the Draft Environmental Assessment based on public comment. The Draft Environmental Assessment, together with this Decision Notice, will serve as the final documents for these proposals.

### **Decision**

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and the need to preserve WCT in the Missouri River drainage of SW Montana, FWP will proceed with the proposed WCT conservation project in Ruby Creek.

I find there are no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



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Patrick J. Flowers  
Region Three Supervisor

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